

Becoming a Teacher:  
A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Motivation and Teacher Identity Formation<sup>1</sup>

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Paper Prepared for **Division K: Section 5 Interactive Symposium: Shaping Teacher  
Lives and Teacher Identities: An Analysis of Underlying Factors**

American Educational Research Association  
San Diego, CA

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<sup>1</sup> The authors gratefully acknowledge the enthusiastic participation of teacher education candidates enrolled in their respective educational psychology and/or special education classes; they represent our *sine qua non*, our motivation to continue university teaching.

## Abstract

Using principles derived from critical pedagogy theory and constructs from motivation theory such as meta-cognition and self-regulation, the authors elicit teacher candidates' voices so as to deepen an understanding of the major factors that shape their identity in becoming teachers, especially in light of today's multicultural societies. They describe preservice and inservice teachers' responses to assignments that engaged them in using critical pedagogical processes which helped them operationalize a philosophy of their teaching and strengthened their motivations to teach. The findings support the importance of identifying and working with the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which teachers work and live. The participants spanned three university settings (two in the south western United States and one in Brunei, Darussalam), underscoring that the cultures within which teachers derive their identity play a significant role in shaping the many different types of "self" that are engaged in the social context of a teacher's practice at particular points in space and time.

In this paper, the authors articulate the contributions of critical pedagogy, motivation, and meta-cognition in framing the research on construction of teacher identity. They describe a narrative inquiry process that guided pre-service teachers to self-reflect about their motivations to become a teacher. Meaningful descriptive narratives derived from the inquiry process were analyzed for generative themes. Cross-cultural comparisons between two groups of preservice teachers (one from the southwestern USA and the other from the Asian country of Brunei Darussalam) illustrated differences and similarities in preservice teacher identity formation and motivation to become teachers. Overall, the process of developing a teacher identity involved struggles for recognition as well as epiphanies of awareness of the role the teaching profession can play in supporting the education of children from under-represented populations. Implications for research and teacher education practice are posed.

Given the complexities involved in learning to teach, developing one's identity as a teacher represents a critical issue in preparing teachers today (Johnson & Colombek, 2002; Yrzúa & Vásquez, 2008). Eliciting teacher candidates' voices through reflection and reflective thinking can form the center of a new educational paradigm that can deepen our understanding of the major factors that shape their identity in becoming teachers, especially in the development of reflective thinkers able to effectively function in today's multicultural societies. Often, in our university classrooms, we have heard teacher candidates question themselves as they struggle to meet classroom demands. They ask questions such as, "How can I keep myself motivated to succeed in the classroom?" and, "How can I meet the challenges of trying to meet national and global

standards with the demands of teaching an increasingly diverse population of students?”

The literature suggests that teacher identity is multifaceted; for example, Graue (2005) noted that learning to teach has a long tradition in benefiting from several developmental perspectives. These perspectives refer to how teachers enter their profession with cultural scripts, self-efficacy beliefs, and personal histories that impact their motivation in selecting the teaching profession, and later, in keeping them in the profession.

### *Theoretical Perspectives*

Our discussion of teacher identity formation is based on two interrelated perspectives: critical pedagogy theory (Freire, 1970; 1998), and constructs from psychological motivation theory such as meta-cognition and self-regulation (Cardelle-Elawar & Sanz de Acedo Lizarraga, 2003; Elliot & Dweck, 2005; Nevin & Cardelle-Elawar, 2003). Research findings suggest the value of these theories in transforming our university teaching, in particular in helping preservice teachers become more thoughtful, active, and reflective practitioners (Nevin, Cardelle-Elawar, Beckett, Thousand, & Diaz-Greenberg, 2002; Nevin & Cardelle-Elawar, 2003; Milner, 2003). These authors designed instruction to engage teachers using critical pedagogical processes that involved them in reflective thinking. Their findings indicate that reflective thinking assignments help teachers not only operationalize a philosophy of their teaching but also shape their skills and strengthen their motivation to teach. Similarly, research findings from Riveiro, Cabanach, and Arias (2001) suggest that reflective teachers need an active sense of themselves as they set academic and motivational goals personally and for their pupils.

Critical pedagogy is a cultural practice that enables teachers and others to view education as a political, social, and cultural enterprise (Giroux, 1988). It views education

as a critical engagement of one's own assumptions, beliefs, and predispositions, while at the same time acknowledging the environments that have shaped the individual to know and perceive in a certain way. The principles of critical pedagogy move teachers into discerning the relationship between self, the classroom, and the larger society (Diaz-Greenberg, 2003; Freire, 1970; 1998; McLaren, 1998; McLaren & Houston, 2004; Tatusco, 2005; Winch, 2004). Diaz-Greenberg's (2003) study of applying Freirean principles in the foreign language classroom (specifically, teaching Spanish to youth whose families came from Spanish-speaking countries) resulted in many students who reclaimed Spanish names. This meant that Rosario herself stopped being called Rose, for example while Alicia no longer responded when her teachers called on "Alice." This type of self-regulation may be similar to Freire's (1970; 1998) concept of *conscientization*, i.e., a deep awareness of one's self in the world. Through the process of a dialogical interaction (using empowering language and providing supports for communication), people can create a mental awareness of one point of view and its opposite (i.e., a *dialectic*). This process can lead to the experience of *praxis*, or a cycle of action-reflection-new action that can transform the individual's experience of the world. Leading prospective teacher candidates to experience praxis is an important even crucial task for teacher educators (Nevin & Cardelle-Elawar, 2003).

According to Parker (1998), by engaging in self-reflection, teachers may solve social and personal problems during their struggles to become teachers. In the processes of self-reflection, they can learn to describe themselves through stories that are grounded within the historical, political and educational context. Teachers' stories become the vehicle which drives the critical analysis of their motivation to become teachers in this

multicultural society. Jackson and Watson (2003) and Kanu (2005) suggest that culture plays a vital role in understanding the tensions and dilemmas that shape the concept of the self as teacher.

Recently, Marri (2005) explored critical pedagogy as a framework for transforming classrooms to better achieve multicultural democratic education. The results of her study of three skilled teachers indicated the value of a dialogic retrospection to understand teachers' individual motivations to become teachers as well as the ways they engaged in social problem solving processes. The dialogic retrospection process enabled them to decide which problems were worth solving, especially when they described to what ends and in whose favor the solutions were directed. In addition, teachers articulated how their own self-image changed. The authors believe that it therefore can be said that Marri's participants experienced *conscientization*, a new awareness (new self-images) and new actions (decision making process for selecting worthy problems to solve), moving from themselves to new social actions (solutions) within their teaching contexts. Praxis is an essential element for teachers when they operationalize their philosophies of teaching. Therefore, teacher educators face the challenge of transforming their instruction to lead prospective teachers to experience conscientization and praxis.

In sum, critical pedagogy helps to create the appropriate atmosphere for developing a dialogic retrospection, possibly creating a bridge between what teachers are currently doing (or think that they should be doing) and what has brought them to the field of teaching. When teachers simultaneously reflect on themselves and the sometimes conflicting expectations of society, they have an opportunity to redirect their energies,

improve their effectiveness and renew their motivation and commitment as advocates of students.

Motivation theory involves the study of factors that energize, direct, and sustain teacher behavior toward accomplishing the goal of students' achievement (Gage & Berliner, 1998; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). A continuing motivation to teach may well be the hallmark of a teacher's lifespan. Some researchers argue that motivation and learning are so interdependent that a teacher cannot understand students' learning without motivation (Pintrich, Marx, & Boyle, 1993). Teachers' motivation is mediated by the metacognitive knowledge of their self-efficacy and self-regulation and is reflected in changes in teachers' behaviors as they gain knowledge of their ability on what, how, and why to teach. These two constructs can help to clarify the role of motivation in shaping teacher identity. The value of an inquiry framework which elicits teacher's voice through narrative interviews is based on the notion that teachers are story tellers who come to know themselves in relation to others through shared stories. The narrative perspective has been used in studies of teacher identity by Clandinin and Connelly (1991), Gomez, Walker, and Page (2000), Nevin and Cardelle-Elawar (2003), and Søreide (2006).

The interdependence of motivational theories with critical pedagogy are significant from a developmental perspective (i.e., metacognitive, cultural, and motivational). Teacher identity reflects teachers' histories that are embedded in varied social and cultural contexts. It becomes the central means by which teachers organize the experience within their educational worlds (Holland et al., 1998). Palmer (1998) describes teacher identity as a subtle dimension of the complex and lifelong process of self-discovery. For Knowles and Cole (1994), it is the way in which teachers think about

themselves as teachers and can be illustrated by the images they create as performers in the classroom. This type of thinking could be an example of *meta-cognition*, a theoretical construct from cognitive motivation theory that refers to the teacher's conscious awareness of his/her own thought processes as a reflective thinker. Meta-cognitive inquiry processes include reflective thinking. By engaging in metacognitive inquiry processes, it is possible that reflective teachers can gain an active sense of themselves as they set academic and motivational goals for themselves and for their students, something that Riveiro et al. (2001) found in their study of teachers.

#### *Interdependence of Critical Pedagogy and Meta-cognitive Motivational Perspectives*

Meta-cognition is related to teacher's self-knowledge and self-evaluation, both essential processes in the development of teacher self-questioning. These processes result in teachers who widen their vision by understanding and gaining conscious control of what motivates them to keep teaching. The processes also empower teachers to acquire a deep awareness of their own cognitive, emotional, and historical motivations to teach, anchoring their awareness to the world(s) in which they and their students live today. Here conscientization illustrates the deep awareness that teachers experience of themselves in interaction with various environments (historical, social, and political).

Through the processes of a dialogical interaction, teachers can create a mental awareness of their self-view in the world in juxtaposition to another teachers' awareness. This can lead to the experience of *praxis*, or a cycle of action-reflection-new action such as self-determination that can transform their experience of their educational world. Changes in praxis can lead teachers to use their metacognitive skills as they become more aware of their strengths and limitations during the act of teaching. This awareness



predisposes teachers to become self-regulated learners by understanding how, when, and why to use appropriate strategies to become successful in the classroom.

Praxis can be connected to another construct from motivation theory, *self-regulation*. Self-regulation involves clarity of purpose and the use of goal-directed actions in teaching (Boekaerts, Pintrich, & Zeidner, 2000). Self-regulated teaching implies that teachers should contribute actively to the direction of their actions as they provide students with opportunities to succeed (Cardelle-Elawar & Sanz de Accedo-Lizarraga, 2003). This view contrasts with teachers just being passive followers of prescribed lesson plans and procedures. To obtain a thorough understanding of self-regulated learning, it is also important to examine how goal orientation and interest interact to affect the use of learning strategies. These two motivational components of self-regulated learning have been found to be positively correlated with the frequent use of metacognitive learning strategies and critical pedagogy cycle.

### *The Cross-Cultural Study*

Dialogic retrospection was used to elicit teacher voices and motivations to teach with preservice and inservice teachers in the USA and Brunei Darussalam (Bradshaw, 2003; Nevin & Cardelle-Elawar, 2003; Nevin, Cardelle-Elawar, Diaz-Greenberg, & Bradshaw, 2003). The purpose was to use dialogic retrospection as a tool to elicit preservice teacher voices to guide them to reflect about themselves and the students that they will be teaching. By using this approach, it was expected that preservice teachers would develop an understanding of the contexts in which they teach and the lives of their students in ways that they may not otherwise contemplate. It was thought that the dialogic retrospection interview process would help develop their individual identities as

teachers. Furthermore, investigating the core of inservice teachers' motivations to become teachers may create an awareness of the self that will assist them in understanding their own students and how their students' pasts might motivate school achievement.

Grounded in meta-cognitive theory and critical pedagogy, the methodology included: (a) dialogic retrospection interview process to elicit participant's voice; (b) reflection on questions to elicit metacognitive knowledge and self-regulatory processes (for example, naming and describing how difficulties or barriers to becoming teachers were overcome); and (c) construction of narratives that represented a phenomenological interpretation of the interviews. The major source of data was the individual biography of each participant. The verbatim written responses to the interviews were collated and analyzed for generative themes across all participants for each of three research questions. An iterative, recursive, constant-comparison process was used to analyze the individual data and then all the data across cultures.

*The Participants: Emerging Teachers.* The participants included nearly two hundred teacher candidates from two countries who represented three diverse locations and teacher preparation programs: 71 preservice and inservice teachers from the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD) teacher education program; 98 graduate and undergraduate students from Arizona State University (ASU); and 30 graduate students from California State University San Marcos (CSUSM). The UBD participants included undergraduates, those taking a post graduate certificate in education and 30 seeking certification in special education. Malay was the predominant ethnicity (77%) including teacher candidates of Chinese, Dusun (a local indigenous group), and Indo-Chinese/Indo-

Malay descent. Of 88% ASU participants who reported their race and ethnicity, 70% were White, 17% Hispanic, 4% African-American, and 9% others (such as Asian, Native American), 84% were undergraduates and 16% were in graduate programs. From CSUSM, 39% declared their race as White or Anglo and 51% declared Latino as their ethnicity and all participants were enrolled in the bilingual (Spanish/English) graduate teacher preparation program. Participants from all sites ranged in age from 19-52 with the mean being between 30 and 32.

*Evidence of Motivation and Teacher Identity Formation.* Themes that emerged from the qualitative analysis of the verbatim interviews show multiple sources of motivation in the formation of a teacher identity for these diverse participants (see Table 1).

Table 1. Themes from the Dialogic Retrospection Process

<i><b>Influence of former teachers</b></i>
<i><b>Commitment to pupils</b></i>
<i><b>Deeper understanding of sources of motivation</b></i>
<i><b>Contexts leading to teacher identity formation</b></i>
<i><b>Self-determination to become teachers</b></i>

Excerpted from Nevin, A., Cardelle-Elawar, M., Diaz-Greenberg, R., & Bradshaw, L. (2003, August). A Cross Cultural Analysis of Motivation to Become a Teacher Using Dialogic Retrospection as a Tool to Elicit Conscientization. Association for Teacher Education Europe, Concurrent Session, Malta. Available Online: <http://www.west.asu.edu/icaxn/ATEE03.html>

Representative verbatim statements from the interviewees provide authenticity for the themes. The statements allow the reader to listen to the voices of the teacher candidates as they overcame challenges to their decisions to become teachers and as they discovered how their decisions might be influenced by their individual contexts.

Influence of former teachers. Participants described the teachers who influenced them most to become teachers as those who provided them with encouragement as students. For example, Losir, a teacher in Brunei returning to complete his Bachelor of Education degree, decided to become a teacher when he was 18. He lived in the jungle in a wooden stilt house with no power or running water. He stated that his most memorable teacher “*spend [sic] most of his salary to support his students as well as the kampong [village] people, especially the poor.*” This dedication to the people in his village encouraged Losir to choose teaching as his career.

Kani, a Dusun in the Special Education Bachelor of Education group, thought about being a teacher since he was 7 years old. He had a memorable teacher who taught him how to spell *apple* by “*showing the real apple*”. This novel method of learning (for his school) provided him with motivation and encouragement to learn English and to believe in his own ability to teach English. For those who come from a traditionally structured teaching philosophy that emphasizes rote memorization, teachers who show an understanding of other ways of knowing are important in motivating and encouraging prospective teachers to similarly adapt their instructional techniques. A USA participant in a bilingual teacher preparation program described her most memorable teacher, Mr. Alarçon, a 5th grade math teacher in Mexico. His enthusiasm to teach was “*incredible and all students in the classroom admired his willingness to share his math hints in class.*” Today, she believes she brings some of his math enthusiasm into her classes and feels that math is “*the most perfect language.*” She also hopes to bring Mr. Alarçon’s “*never give up*” attitude into her own career as she can still remember some of the jokes the class used to play with and on him.

Although the positive characteristics of teachers were mentioned by almost every participant as motivators to become a teacher, more than 25% of the UBD participants and approximately 5% of the USA participants remembered teachers who were less than desirable role models. These negative memories illustrate further their struggle to overcome and triumph as successful students. In addition, the less than positive role models in their lives seemed to further cement participants' identities as teachers. Struggles to overcome negative memories include Brunei nationals such as Ashkin, who remembers the teacher *"who embarrassed her students in class"* and Fatimah, 38, who vividly remembers *"two strict male teachers who used to pinch and beat their pupils if they were naughty or when they could not answer or do their school work. These teachers also made me stand outside the classroom for almost a week because I forgot to bring my exercise books."* Stacy, an African-American USA participant, remembers a third grade teacher who accused her of calling another student *nigger* [in the United States, a negatively valenced stereotypical term for Negro] and then asked her not to use this word because *"You are a nigger, too!"* Lauren, also a USA participant, decided to become a teacher around 18 years of age. *"What inspired me were the good and also bad ones I had throughout high school. A teacher who stands out ... is my freshman English teacher who was very witty which I had never seen in an English teacher..... Another teacher who stands out is my junior year English teacher ... a beastly woman who made me write a lot, but in retrospect, I am thankful for the skills and practice that were given."*

The negative valence earned by some former teachers seemed to be powerful motivators for participants in this study to teach differently. Sometimes they traced their own struggles to become teachers to the influence of their former teachers. The verbatim

excerpts from these participants illustrate how motivation and encouragement from their teachers as both positive and negative role models emerged into a positive foundation for their own teacher identity formation and served as a source of motivation and encouragement to become, as one participant voiced, the “*best teacher possible*”.

The influence of former teachers emerged as both a source of motivation to become a teacher because of former teachers’ encouragement, compassion, and passion and as a model for their own identity formation. In addition, former teachers seemed to increase the desire to overcome obstacles that the teacher candidates faced, especially if the former teacher’s obstacle was similar in nature to theirs (such as coming from poverty, racial or ethnic heritage, or differences in English language proficiency).

Commitment to students. Identity is linked to position and employment in our society, forming an integral part of our identity as a person. For those in the teaching profession, identity may seem in part to be derived from those we teach—i.e., students. This commitment to students is illustrated by Brunei preservice teachers. For example, Irnie, a 23 year old Malay who had worked in Home Tuition Schools, knew in Upper 6 (grade 12 in the USA) that she would be a teacher and was motivated to complete her studies because some of her friends “*are dropouts and cannot find work.*” One motivating factor for her was for her students “[to] *be productive people in society.*” Another Brunei participant, Yusmawati, is 28 years old and completed a Bachelor Science (Honors) in Technology Management from a UK university. He stated, “[I] *would like to motivate and educate the children so that they can achieve the maximum potentials so that they can one day become useful assets to the country. [My] personal goal is to become one of the best and caring educators in the country*”.

Participants from the USA reported they, too, were motivated by student success, with the following verbatim remarks illustrating a commitment to their students. A USA bilingual participant, Johnna, wrote that what keeps her motivated is *“when [I] see the spark in a student’s eye when they understand something.”* Paco, another USA participant, described a former teacher’s compassion, patience, and kindness in speaking Spanish to his Spanish-speaking father. He said, *“[This] made a tremendous impact on my interest in English Language Learner (ELL) students and strong belief in bilingual education.”* Another USA bilingual education participant noted, *“[My] Students keep me motivated; the fact that I might be the high point of their day keeps me motivated. My students make me believe that I am being a positive contributor to our hard and sometimes dismal world. By helping them I am helping our future. I am here for them, and even though they don’t know it, they are here for me...”*

In summary, this theme indicates how the formation of a teacher identity emanated from those we teach as well as how the notion of improving society can be a source of motivation. A particularly strong source of motivation seems to have been derived from participants who referenced their own students’ successes.

Deeper understanding of sources of motivation. Most of the USA participants at the graduate level were teaching in K-12 classrooms and only one does not mention implicitly or explicitly any increased awareness of their motivation to be teachers with this dialogic retrospection exercise, whereas 13 (93%) do. An art teacher from the Navajo Reservation in northern Arizona, Panthea explained: *“Mrs. W. appreciated how my art reflected my Navajo culture and thought I was a great artist. I am continually motivated by the chance I have each day to make a difference in my student’s lives.”* Gambler

explained, *“I follow the example of my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade teacher who had a soft-spoken voice and hugged each student every day. I do not raise my voice in my classroom. I keep motivated to achieve my goals as a teacher by continuing to take classes in education.”* A USA bilingual education participant noted, *“My 9<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher was always there for us, he was nice and happy to see us and would joke around with us. This is how I try to be [with my own students].”* For a small number of the USA participants learning to be bilingual teachers (N=3, or about 1.5% of the population of all participants in the study), the role of religion was mentioned as a source of motivation to become a teacher and illustrates an awareness of deeper understanding of their struggle to overcome external pressures and find their own identity separate from that of the family and religion. One participant said, *“The prospect or goal of a college degree was never pushed on my sister or me. Our parents felt that the time spent studying at a university was wasted time. Part of the reason I believe my parents felt this way was because of our religion. Part of the Jehovah’s Witness doctrine is that the life spent here on earth should be dedicated to the worship of Jehovah. Given this, many of the obstacles I’ve had to overcome to get to this point have been religious. It is important to make the distinction here that the religious obstacle has always been external. It has been the pressure from aunts, uncles, congregation Elders, cousins, and to a lesser extent, parents that has exhausted my perseverance and not my own personal struggles with what may be viewed as diametrically opposed goals.”*

A deeper understanding of motivation to teach is part of the struggle for these teachers; part of their struggle to become teachers and to continue teaching. A lack of this deeper understanding may be a factor in contributing to the high turnover rate school



districts experience with new teacher graduates. The excerpts that support this theme can be characterized as caring to make a difference and connecting to a higher power. It should be noted that this is one theme where the Brunei voices were silent. However, the formation of a teacher identity may be strengthened when teacher candidates realize that their personal motivation in choosing the teaching profession may not match the expectations of significant others. In this way, perhaps the *dialectic* emerges more strongly wherein the candidate must hold a future vision of him/herself as *teacher* in contrast to current pressures to behave differently.

Contexts leading to teacher identity formation. The authors expected more historical, social, cultural, and political events would be mentioned as influencing the initiation of teacher identity; however, personal contexts were more frequently mentioned. This may be a function of the interview protocol itself where some interviewers may not have felt comfortable to probe for more information, or it may reflect a lack of awareness of social, cultural, or political contexts. It should be noted that very few of the participants had been exposed to formal study of critical pedagogy principles.

Many UBD participants reported they were influenced by family members to become teachers whereas USA participants more frequently mentioned influences from social and political contexts. Yani, 23, earning a teaching certificate after completing a Bachelor Science in Chemistry in the UK, explained that the reason she wanted to be a teacher was because most of her family work as teachers. Amanda, a USA participant, initially planned a career as a physical therapist, but she changed her mind in her second year of college and entered the teaching program. She had been working with teenage

girls for about a year, she explained, when “*one day it just hit me that I wanted to be a teacher.*” Similarly, Cathy, also a USA participant, wrote, “*When I was a child, I had a desire to become a teacher. Somehow, I managed to move away from that goal, as I grew older. However, when the incident at Columbine High School<sup>2</sup> occurred a few years ago, it stirred up feelings and desires to return to the career path I am now on.*” A USA participant who was planning to become a bilingual educator wrote, “*I had a career in feature films in Hollywood. It was glamorous but at the same time hard work and long crazy hours. Then my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. During the 2 weeks that I spent at home by her side she made me realize that life is so precious and not to work it away doing something that is unfulfilling. Then I went into debt to complete my teacher education [program].*”

Brunei participants shared similar perspectives. For example, Mariam was motivated to be a teacher by the low standard living of her family and the “*wish of my parents.*” Others explained that the current unemployment problem and the promises of job security in the teaching profession served as a strong source of their motivation. One participant mentioned that he “*did not really have any interest in becoming a teacher but was forced by the economic situation;*” while another stated that he was “*motivated by the money, security, and the urge to help students excel.*” Salary and or job benefits were stated by 32% of the Brunei participants as one of their reasons for pursuing teaching as a career but were rarely mentioned by USA participants. In one example, a bilingual educator from the USA noted her commitment to teaching in spite of low salary

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<sup>2</sup> Referred to as the Columbine High School massacre, two socially isolated teens murdered or maimed dozens of their high school classmates on April 20, 1999 in Columbine, Colorado, a suburb of Denver in the United States; in its wake, several national programs to identify and prevent bullying on high school campuses as well as systems for handling potential terrorist attacks of any kind.

prospects, “[In another career], *I would not be able to enjoy the same level of excitement and happiness as a banker, mechanic, etc. because I would not have the same opportunity to help others become more independent learners and watch them grow and develop worthy skills and abilities.*”

Cultural influences could be derived from an analysis of the impact of watching movies about teachers and teaching, especially in teacher identity formation. Pop culture affects everyone throughout our global society and students often emulate the icons of pop culture. Accessibility of film media (movies, digital media, videos) has become a large part of modern entertainment lifestyle, and in some classrooms, an instructional pedagogy. Media effects have been studied in many areas including the effect on children who watch violent interactions (Hearold, 1986; Murray, 1994, 2000; Paik & Comstock, 1994). Media can serve to interest, motivate, and stimulate reflection in preservice and inservice teachers (Tan, 2006). Asking participants to name and discuss movies may provide some insight into the formation of teacher identity today.

Indeed, naming a movie in which teachers were featured evoked a powerful imaging process—all but three of the participants named at least one movie which may serve as an example of social learning through imitation and modeling. A surprising overlap occurred for seven movies named by participants from both the USA and Brunei Darussalam: *Dangerous Minds*; *To Sir with Love*, *The Miracle Worker*; *Dead Poet's Society*, *Good Will Hunting*, *Music of Your Heart*, and the TV show *Boston Public*. Films that were not named by USA participants but were named by Bruneian participants included four American movies (*Paradise*, *Kindergarten Cop*, *Road to Avonlea*, *Sister Act*) and four movies unique to the BD culture (*Adik Manja*; *Gakko No Sensei*, *GTO*;

*Kolej 69*; and *Chinese Drama*). This may not be a surprising outcome in that Bruneians' choices of movies might be expected for this area of the world.

In fact, this outcome lends credibility to the study by showing that local and regional cultural iconic representations of teachers (as interpreted by the film industry) may be a factor in teacher identity formation. Correspondingly, many of the participants in the USA whose cultural heritage reflected Hispanic origins selected *Stand and Deliver*, perhaps due to the fact that the movie features a bilingual teacher from South America who worked with bilingual students in the *barrio*, an inner-city high school in Los Angeles. It is possible that participants connected with the teacher characters in movies because the characters triumphed even when given the most challenging classes to teach and the characters also did not always follow the rules. Some participants related to how the teacher movie characters made school fun but continued to hold high expectations (such as Robin Williams in *Dead Poet's Society*). Others mentioned identifying with how the teacher movie characters made a difference in and changed the lives of students. Similar to superhero worship, the identification process combined with the social learning model may have reinforced their respective visions of what it means to be a teacher, strengthening an identity aligned with the best that they would like to be.

The results of this study resonate with Tan (2006) who used films to promote reflective practice in pre-service teachers. In discussing the construction of identity in teaching, Watson (2006) analyzed narratives of practice. It may be helpful for pre-service teachers to utilize both visual imagery and narratives to uncover their emerging constructions of a teacher identity. Using movies as curricula and appropriate pedagogical strategies might create opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage in

cultural analysis as a process for understanding and/or constructing teacher identity. In fact, in the current study, the researchers realize that they had missed the opportunity to coach their pre-service students to delve into the socio-political and cultural-historical perspectives of the films they mentioned. The process of interrogating the film's identity construction of each *film-teacher* and the concomitant societal myths concerning what it means to teach could yield insights about their own cultural, social, political, and historical contexts in their own identity constructions<sup>3</sup>.

Self-determination to become teachers. Participants from the USA and Brunei showed self-determination and self-conscious awareness of their struggles to overcome barriers on their journeys to becoming teachers. Self-determination seemed to be driven by three factors: personal motivations to overcome, family impetus, and economic need. For example, Dewi, 21, completing a Bachelor of Education in Teaching English as a Second Language at UBD, reported that her “*desire to pursue another career and her desire to study overseas are the greatest obstacles to completing teacher education*”, but she is motivated by the fact that teachers “*have respected status in [Bruneian] society*”. Similarly, Jill, a USA participant, found herself dealing with “*a difficult situation...going through a divorce. This meant finding a career and becoming a single parent.*” And listen to the voice of a bilingual educator from the USA who wrote, “*Another barrier was that a member of my family committed suicide just before my teacher program started.*”

Overall, many Bruneian students expressed concerns about their inability to communicate well in English, to stand up in front of students, and to speak or teach. Similarly, perhaps showing a solidarity across the national cultures (USA and Brunei), participants from Arizona and Southern California (border states with Mexico) whose

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<sup>3</sup> The authors appreciate this suggestion from an anonymous reviewer of the original manuscript.

families had immigrated from Mexico sometimes mentioned their inability to communicate well in English; listen to Sri, Zura, Hector, and Bobbie. Sri, a 22 years old Malay, explained that her greatest obstacle was her *“lack of communication skills and confidence”*. Zura, a 21year old Malay woman, is *“afraid of my English language skills”* but mentioned that her love of math and the high expectation of her family keep her motivated to achieve her goal to become a teacher. Hector, a USA participant whose family emigrated from Mexico, has overcome *“many barriers... [such as] the fear of failing....”* Similarly, Bobbie, also from the USA, said the barrier she must overcome is her *“own self-doubt...to believe that [I] can do this though [I] am an older student.”* A bilingual teacher candidate from USA stated, *“One barrier that I guess is a barrier but that I had never thought of as a barrier before was becoming bilingual. It hasn’t been easy learning Spanish and I still feel like I have a lot to learn.”*

For the USA participants, the most frequently named barriers they had to overcome in their pursuit of a teacher identity involved four factors: financial difficulties, lack of self-esteem and confidence, changes in marital status, and births of children. In contrast, for the Brunei Darussalam participants, the most frequently named barriers that they had to overcome involved three different factors: school workload and exams, concerns with their ability to present to a group especially in English, and the perceived stress of working with children. Other barriers mentioned include the lack of motivation to be a teacher and the desire to pursue another career.

The overall conclusion from this theme is that teacher identity formation is derived from many different places, home, family, experiences, and views about the social and political situation. The theme reflected personal and familial sources of

motivation, similar to findings reported by Yong (1995), Howell (1997), and Jones, Young, and Rodriguez, (1999).

### Discussion

In this section, the authors discuss how results of the study might illuminate teacher preparation programs with respect to engendering in teachers a deeper personal and cultural awareness of their identities as teachers. The following issues are emphasized: influence of academic disciplines, the role of teachers as oppressors, the development of critical consciousness, and emerging changes in *praxis* towards social justice.

*Influence of academic disciplines.* In this study, teacher candidates from two nations included those seeking certification in specific teaching disciplines: special education, general education, or English as a Second Language teachers. Even though the qualitative analysis did not reveal differences related to academic discipline, other researchers have explored the role of academic discipline with respect to influencing perspectives on teaching (e.g., Jarvis-Selinger, Collins, & Pratt, 2006).

*Role of teacher as oppressor.* In this study, participants stayed at the level of personal awareness with some instances of cultural awareness and even fewer instances of the historical or political contexts. Issues surrounding power, domination, or authority were not examined *per se*. Although it may be inferred from some narratives that some of these teacher candidates recognize the role of teachers as oppressors (e.g., use of corporal punishment and humiliation tactics), further studies could illuminate the extent to which these issues serve as potential barriers or motivators to those who seek entry into the teaching profession. Perhaps a more qualitative study conducted over several years would

lead to a deeper understanding of the political and historical influences (possibly beginning while still in junior high and high school), along the lines of the work of Bettis and Adams (2005) and McLeod and Yates (2006). These researchers collected evidence of longitudinal and qualitative studies of adolescents and their identity formation. In a comprehensive book review, Garbrecht (2006) concluded that both books contribute to our understanding of the context, social interactions and discourse in school environments and how these complex interactions shape the identity formation process.

*Development of critical consciousness.* The development of critical consciousness might serve as a motivating factor for emerging teachers to intervene and change their personal realities. Several leading researchers have written eloquently about this aspect of infusing a disposition to act on behalf of challenging the inequities that continue to permeate schooling practices. For example, social justice is not absent from the discourse in teacher education circles (Cochran-Smith, 1999; Noddings, 2005). Although greater elaboration of the social justice discourse is beyond the scope of this paper, two examples are provided here because they are related to the authors' areas of expertise—one from the discourse on inclusive education and the other from the discourse on social studies education (specifically, global education). In the discourse on inclusive education (a discourse that may be familiar to special education majors), Lipsky and Gartner (1996) justified the notions of transforming special education from a segregated to an inclusive orientation based on ideals of social justice in light of the long history of exclusion from general education curriculum. Thousand, McNeil, and Nevin (2000) argued that one method to achieve social justice would be to add education for responsibility to the school restructuring agenda. Articulating social justice in terms of citizenship education



(an argument that social studies teacher candidates might find familiar), Banks (2004) has placed teaching for social justice at the forefront of the goals of global education.

*Emerging changes in praxis towards social justice.* The authors note that participants from Brunei and the USA did not explicitly mention their desire to take actions that could be construed as oriented towards social justice. On the other hand, we argue that some participants seemed to connect changes in their current teaching actions (albeit in student teaching or internship settings) to the new awareness that emerged as a result of the dialogic processes. We further argue that one responsibility of teacher education professors is to elicit and listen to the voices of their teacher candidates. Professors can use participatory methods that result in increased awareness of social justice issues such as dialogue teaching and critical literacy (Kluth, Nevin, Thousand, & Diaz-Greenberg, 2002). In dialogue teaching, students themselves help professors generate the curriculum, design their own instructional methods, and report their progress within a framework of consciousness raising group dynamics. In critical literacy, students become self-advocates, for example by watching videos or films of people from their cultures whose life-situations may be similar to their own. They can write autobiographies that are then critiqued regarding the language they use to describe themselves, comparing and contrasting their own perhaps culturally unique problem solving and life affirming ways of dealing with difficulties. With methods such as these, the teacher education professor can tone down the more traditionally didactic student-teacher interactions, reject the often one-way hierarchical model of knower-to-learner, and view students as people, as experts in their own lives and experiences. Thus, teacher

educators, working alone or as a group, can do much to advance the notions of social justice with respect to who is in charge of a student's learning.

The authors conclude that the results of this study can provide important insights for teacher education professors. Although the literature base for motivation theories is much stronger for the K-12 pupil population, this study can illuminate factors that seem to influence teacher candidates' motivation to choose teaching as a career and to form a strong identity as a teacher. The data seem to tell us that many of the participants in the study, independent of their respective unique cultures, attribute their motivation to enter teaching to their own pupils' successes, to an ethic of caring and to their own efforts in overcoming problems.

Motivation can be characterized as the thread that unifies cultures or transcends cultural barriers (i.e., language, familial culture, socio-economic background, historical or political considerations), especially teacher candidates' self-determination to become educators (independent of grade level and culture). The data from the United States show that this cultural and linguistic diversity becomes even more difficult for teacher candidates because of the No Child Left Behind (2001) mandate, and the Brunei data also speaks to the diversity of pupil populations that teacher candidates in Brunei encounter with respect to language and culture. We are inspired, in fact, that the teacher candidates in this study made decisions in spite of the difficulties of the moment. We are inspired to ensure that our respective teacher education programs provide all teacher candidates with similar opportunities for enrichment as well as the personal and social support to face the demands that an increasingly diverse population brings to classroom teaching.

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### About the Authors

A teacher educator who has participated in the development of innovative special education teacher education programs since the 1970s, Dr. Ann Nevin describes herself as a "participant-learner in this project. I am a female from a 2nd generation family of American Irish and Dutch descent. The strengths I bring to this experience include 30 years of working with many people to help students with disabilities succeed." Dr. Nevin is a prolific researcher and writer (having published 15 books and over 150 journal articles). For recent examples, see Landorf & Nevin (2007), Inclusive global education: Implications for social justice. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 45(6). 711-723. Retrieved January 20, 2009: <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/mcb/074/2007/00000045/00000006/art00005> and Nevin, Thousand, & Villa, R. A. (2009). Collaborative teaching for teacher educators? *The New Educator*.

A phenomenological researcher, Dr. Lori Bradshaw describes herself as "intensely committed to eliciting and listening to the voices of teachers and prospective teachers." Her research includes phenomenological analyses of the lived experiences of inclusive classroom teachers as well as parents of students with disabilities in North America, Brunei Darussalam, Bahrain, and Qatar.

An educational psychologist and former Montessori school teacher and principal, Dr. Maria Cardelle-Elawar describes herself as being "proud to be an educator which I believe is the most noble of all professions. I am bilingual and I have had successful experiences in living, studying, and working in three different cultures (in Spain, in Venezuela, and now, in the United States). Life gave me enough experience to enjoy my work and develop a passion to help those who will not be the same without me." Dr. Cardelle-Elawar's research in self-regulation, cognitive and metacognitive psychology has led to important distinctions about how children learn to think about problem solving using computers. Her IDEA model of problem solving has received international acclaim for its robust effects on increasing student achievement.

A teacher educator, Dr. Rosario Diaz-Greenberg describes herself as "a Latina who believes that all members of society have the ability to contribute to make a better world. My philosophy of education is deeply rooted in the work of Paulo Friere, who is a source of inspiration. The concept of liberatory education permeates my life. I feel that all human beings need to become aware of their capacity to be architects of their own destiny rather than shadows of someone else's thoughts." Her research includes the application of Freire's pedagogy to teaching Latino teenagers to express their voices as well as to supporting other educators to apply the pedagogy to their teaching. She is the author of *Voices of Latino/a Teens*, published by Peter Lang.

*Becoming a Teacher: A Cross-Cultural Analysis of Motivation and Teacher Identity Formation*

- Lori Bradshaw
- Ann Nevin
- Rosario Diaz-Greenberg
- Maria Cardelle-Elawar

Presentation for AERA Division K, Section 5  
Shaping Teacher Lives and Teacher Identities: An Analysis of Underlying Factors  
April 13, 2009

## Rosario Diaz-Greenberg



- I am a teacher educator, and I describe myself as "a Latina who believes that all members of society have the ability to contribute to make a better world. My philosophy of education is deeply rooted in the work of Paulo Freire who I consider a source of inspiration. The concept of liberatory education permeates my life."
- I feel that all human beings need to become aware of their capacity to be architects of their own destiny rather than shadows of someone else's thoughts."

## Where Am I From?

San Salvador, El Salvador



## Ann Nevin



- "I've been a teacher educator who has participated in the development of innovative special education teacher education programs since the 1970s."
- I describe myself as a teacher educator who is a participant-learner. I am a female from a 2nd generation family of American-Irish and Dutch descent. The strengths I bring to teaching include over 40 years of working with many people to help students with disabilities succeed."



## Lori Bradshaw

- A phenomenological researcher, Dr. Lori Bradshaw describes herself as "intensely committed to eliciting and listening to the voices of teachers and prospective teachers."
- Her research includes phenomenological analyses of the lived experiences of inclusive classroom teachers as well as parents of students with disabilities in North America, Brunei Darussalam, Bahrain, and Qatar.



Lori exploring Temple To Athena, Sicily



Jane' Asr Hassanil Bolkiah Mosque in Brunei

## Maria Cardelle-Elawar

- An educational psychologist and former Montessori school teacher and principal, Dr. Maria Cardelle-Elawar describes herself as being "proud to be an educator which I believe is the most noble of all professions. I am bilingual and I have had successful experiences in living, studying, and working in three different cultures (in Spain, in Venezuela, and now, in the United States). Life gave me enough experience to enjoy my work and develop a passion to help those who will not be the same without me."
- Dr. Cardelle-Elawar's research in self regulation, cognitive and metacognitive psychology has led to important distinctions about how children learn to think about problem solving using computers. Her IDEA model of problem solving has received international acclaim for its robust effects on increasing student achievement.



Scenic Palm Walk on ASU West Campus



## Our Hypothesis



Principles from critical pedagogy, meta-cognition, and motivation theory offer different perspectives and pedagogies that help prospective teachers value their learners' strengths as well as the sociopolitical and cultural context of themselves and their learners .

## What is critical pedagogy?

- A pedagogical practice with roots in Paulo Freire (Brazil) and the "Frankfurt School" of philosophy
- Teach people how to "read" the world, using the reality of the people who are learning
- Goal: Become LITERATE for a purpose of changing reality
- Core Belief: Change can only happen from within yourself
- Core Practice: Dialogue
- Praxis: Reflection - Action - Reflection - Action...

## PAULO FREIRE's philosophy of education

is based on the conviction that

- ◆ *Every human being is capable of looking critically at his world in a dialogical encounter with others.*
- ◆ *And if he/she is provided with the proper tools for such an encounter, he can gradually perceive his personal and social reality and deal critically with it.*

## 3 Critical Pedagogy

Principles of dialogue and dialectic (which guided the interview process) to elicit voice and stimulate praxis (action- reflection-action) leading to



*Conscientization*

## Method to Elicit Voice

- Grounded in meta-cognitive theory and critical pedagogy, the researchers
- Used dialogic retrospection interview process to elicit participant's voice;
- Encouraged students to reflect on questions to elicit metacognitive knowledge and self-regulatory processes (for example, naming and describing how difficulties or barriers to becoming teachers were overcome)
- Constructed narratives that represented a phenomenological interpretation of the interviews
- Used constant-comparative analysis across all narratives to identify generative themes

## Participants from 3 Diverse Settings

- 71 preservice and inservice teachers from the University of Brunei Darussalam (UBD)
- 98 graduate and undergraduate students from Arizona State University (ASU)
- 30 graduate students from California State University San Marcos (CSUSM).

## Ethnic and Racial Diversity

- Malay was the predominant ethnicity, also Chinese, Dusun (a local indigenous group), and Indo-Chinese/Indo-Malay descent.
- Of 88% ASU participants who reported their race and ethnicity, 70% were White, 17% Hispanic, 4% African-American, and 9% others (such as Asian, Native American).
- From CSUSM, 39% declared their race as White or Anglo and 51% declared Latino as their ethnicity; all were bilingual (Spanish/English).

## Evidence of Motivation and Teacher Identity Formation

### 5 Themes

- **Influence of former teachers**
- **Commitment to pupils**
- **Deeper understanding of sources of motivation**
- **Contexts leading to teacher identity formation**
- **Self-determination to become teachers**

## Participants' Voices-- Influence of former teachers

- Losir, a teacher in Brunei returning to complete his Bachelor of Education degree, remembers a teacher who spent *"most of his salary to support his students as well as the kampong [village] people, especially the poor."*
- A USA participant remembers Mr. Alarçon, a 5th grade math teacher in Mexico. His enthusiasm to teach was *"incredible and all students in the classroom admired his willingness to share his math hints in class."*
- Lauren, also a USA participant, decided to become a teacher around 18 years of age. *"What inspired me were the good and also bad ones I had throughout high school."*

## Participants' Voices— Commitment to pupils

- One motivating factor for Irmie (a 23 year old Malay) was for her students *"[to] be productive people in society."*
- Johnna wrote she is motivated *"when [I] see the spark in a student's eye when they understand something."*
- A bilingual education participant noted, *"[My] Students keep me motivated."*

## Participants' Voices-- Deeper understanding of sources of motivation

- An art teacher from the Navajo Reservation in northern Arizona, Panthea explained: *"Mrs. W. appreciated how my art reflected my Navajo culture and thought I was a great artist. I am continually motivated by the chance I have each day to make a difference in my student's lives."*
- A USA bilingual education participant noted, *"My 9th grade science teacher was always there for us, he was nice and happy to see us and would joke around with us. This is how I try to be [with my own students]."*

## Participants' Voices-- Contexts leading to teacher identity formation

- Mariam (from Brunei) was motivated to be a teacher by the low standard living of her family and the *"wish of my parents."*
- Another Bruneian stated that he was *"motivated by the money, security, and the urge to help students excel."*
- A USA bilingual participant said, in spite of low salary prospects, *"[In another career], I would not be able to enjoy the same level of excitement and happiness as a banker, mechanic, etc. because I would not have the same opportunity to help others become more independent learners and watch them grow and develop worthy skills and abilities."*

## Participants' Voices--Self-determination to become teachers

- Sri, a 22 years old Malay, faced her greatest obstacle -- "*lack of communication skills and confidence*"
- Zura, a 21year old Malay woman, faced her fear-- "*afraid of my English language skills*"
- Hector, a USA participant whose family emigrated from Mexico, faced "*many barriers... [such as] the fear of failing...*"
- Bobbie, also from the USA, said the barrier she faced was her "*own self-doubt...*"

## Conclusions

- independent of their respective unique cultures, participants attributed their motivation to enter teaching
  - to their own pupils' successes,
  - to an ethic of caring and
  - to their own efforts in overcoming problems.
- Motivation can be characterized as the thread that
  - unifies cultures, or
  - transcends cultural barriers (i.e., language, familial culture, socio-economic background, historical or political considerations), and
  - emphasizes teacher candidates' self-determination to become educators (independent of grade level and culture).

## Issues

- influence of academic disciplines,
- the role of teachers as oppressors,
- the development of critical consciousness, and
- emerging changes in *praxis* towards social justice

How might we do it?



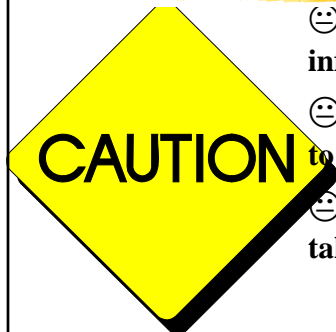
We can listen to our students' critiques of their schools and their schooling experiences.

Teacher educators can stimulate metacognitive thinking processes that makes it possible for students with to think, "I can monitor my own motivation and development."

Teacher educators can capture the power of *conscientization* experiences that lead students to experience the generative will power to use "the powers I have to make a difference in my life's situation."

By helping our students name their worlds, they would be learning to change their worlds.

## CAVEATS



☹ Lack of information

☹ Lack of partners to help you reflect

☹ Reluctance to take new action



## Invitation to Dialogue

Freire (1990) reminds us there is no formula, no need to "replicate" his work.

Instead, discover anew what it means to *read your world and change your 'world' by changing your 'words'?*